

↪ Being Young Was Her Thing

Being young was her thing, and she was the best at it. But every year, more and more girls came out of nowhere and tried to steal her thing.

One of these days I'm going to have to get a new thing, she thought to herself—but as quietly as she could, because she knew that if anyone ever caught her thinking this thought, her thing would be over right then.

↪ Angel Echeverria, Comediante Superpopular

You only needed one great bit, and that was all he had. But that was all you needed.

He would do crowd work for twenty minutes, loosening the crowd up, throwing in some local references to life in the Bay Area and to Mexican American life at the turn of the millennium—basically just putting everyone at ease and letting them know he was one of them, which he was, and that he wasn't going to hassle anybody, which he wasn't.

Then he'd start the bit.

"You ever go into this store, Whole Foods, man? Everything is so expensive."

People were already laughing without even noticing that they were. Yes, of course they had been inside a Whole Foods, and yes, of course they had noticed the higher prices.

"But you know why it's so expensive? It's all up to the food. It's all in the food's mind. It's because of how the food *thinks* of itself." He pointed to his brain. "The food *believes* in itself, man. It has *confidence*. It has self-respect. It has *self-worth*. You just have to look at the labels: SOY NUTS."

He held his expression and waited for the quickest pockets

of the crowd to catch on and spread the laughter to the people around them. It usually took between five and five and a half seconds to reach its peak.

“soy *milk*.” Now the whole crowd was with him.

“The food knows what it is, man! It *proclaims* it!”

He was killing, and there was no looking back now.

“You go into Albertsons or Vons or, you know, that knockoff Vons, Jons?” Yes, they knew. “You see the shelves?” He went into his shopper voice (which was also his cop voice): “What’s this? Who are you?” Now he shrugged his body deep into his shoulders and adopted the voice of a wimpy, moody adolescent boy: “Miiiiilk.”

This was it, this was the bit all right—the one they had paid to see without even knowing what it would be—and he wasn’t going to let it go anytime soon.

“Who are you?” repeated the cop/shopper. “Nuts, I *guess*,” said the same dumb, shy boy through Angel Echeverria’s microphone, shyly shuffling his feet, one on top of the other. “I *guess* I’m nuts. I don’t know if you want to buy me.” Angel Echeverria then reclaimed his confident self again, a confidence lifted subtly but perceptibly higher than before by the knowledge coursing through his body that he now was so thoroughly destroying the audience he so loved. “You go into Whole Foods? *SOY NUTS!!!*” He pounded his fist proudly on an invisible podium and waited—not even for the sake of timing now, but for people to pause and literally replenish their breath so they would be physically able to laugh more. “*YO SOY SAUCE! CÔMPRAME!*” He could now slip in and out of English and Spanish and they wouldn’t even notice the transition; it was as if he weren’t a comedian anymore but the voice in their own heads entertaining them at this point. “*Sí, yo tengo una identidad, un confidence, un pride. YO SE QUIÉN YO SOY! I am worth*

it!” He strutted around the stage, elbows high, being for the crowd a proud bottle of soy sauce with a smile headed skyward as the men and women in the audience, enveloped in the comfort of being entertained and the elation of being understood, applauded and cheered as long as they could, minutes on end, to express a gratitude that would last for months.

Everyone who saw Angel Echeverria saw him a second time, but no one saw him a third. They all wished he would find a new bit as good as the Whole Foods bit, and so did he. But he had what he had and he did what he did, and everyone remembered him fondly.

people would always hate it. Was it good? Was it bad? It wasn't its job to know. It was just its job to be what it was.

As the sun started to burn its way down in the sky, the market decided to just stop thinking for a while, stop working for a while, and get some rest.

The next day, the market was up!

→ The Vague Restaurant Critic

"More satisfying than a candy bar, but less satisfying than love," wrote the vague restaurant critic in his debut review.

"This is not helpful at all," murmured his readers to themselves, meaning no harm as they went elsewhere to find information more like what they had been looking for.

Before the vague restaurant critic could write a second review, he was fired.

A couple of weeks more and he might have caught on. He might have developed a following beyond the world of the traditional restaurant review readers for what he was doing, for the statement he was trying to make—about criticism, about restaurants, about our expectations in life on a larger level.

But he was fired before any of that could happen.

If it was even going to happen.

He didn't care. He knew what he did.

But he kind of did care. He wished other people knew what he did, too.